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Article

Can Social Identities Improve Working Students' Academic and Social Outcomes? Lessons from Three Studies

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Abstract: Previous literature has linked working for pay while attending university with negative academic and health outcomes, yet working students are often resilient when experiencing such adverse circumstances. This makes it crucial to explore potential psychological mechanisms which transform adverse experiences into sources of motivation and persistence for working students. We explore one mechanism – social identification – and its different foci – identifying as a student, employee, working student, or as a student of one's discipline of study – as potential predictors of important academic (academic self-efficacy, approaches to learning, and academic achievement) and social (status in society) outcomes in three cross-sectional studies. In Study 1, part-time working hours (but not identification processes) were associated with academic self-efficacy. In Study 2, discipline identification and part-time working hours were associated with using deep approaches to learning. In Study 3, student identification was associated with increased status in society. Overall, discipline identification may be solely linked to academic outcomes, yet student identification should be explored further as a potential enhancer of social and graduate outcomes. We discuss additional mechanisms which can help to transform working students' experiences through their social identities and suggest boundary conditions which can affect the link between these identities and important outcomes.

Keywords: social identity; working students; academic achievement; approaches to learning; academic self-efficacy

1. Introduction

The sheer number of working students in higher education is increasing worldwide [1,2]. Working undergraduate students may encompass 40% or more of all undergraduate students in the UK [1], with similar or increased representation in Australia [3] and the USA [4]. This increase in the number of working students [5] has coincided with an increased interest in how they experience higher education [6], and particular focus has been placed on the relationships between working status and physical and mental health outcomes [7], and between working status and academic attainment [8]. Indeed, working students can experience increased tiredness [9] and have disrupted sleep patterns [10], as well as increased levels of stress and anxiety [11], and depression [7]. These negative health consequences can also have knock-on effects for reducing working students' levels of academic attainment [12], as working students exhibit higher levels of tardiness [13], miss more classes [14] and avoid attending campus altogether [15]. Overall, understanding the negative experiences associated with being a working student is important for universities and policy makers as these experiences can cause working students to prolong their studies [16] or to quit their education pursuits altogether [17].

However, negative consequences are only one side of the working student experience. A new wave of research demonstrates how they can transform their experiences to build resilience and maintain motivation for their studies [18,19]. Universities have also shown increased interest in

providing structural support for working students to normalise their experience of higher education and to increase graduation rates [4,20]. Together, these research streams highlight the importance of understanding working students holistically and identifying mechanisms for universities to help them in transforming their experiences with the aim of improving their academic, social, and graduate outcomes.

One way of understanding working students is by discussing the different groups in which they can participate meaningfully as this can help them to see themselves positively and unlock their resilience. To help with this, the concept of social identity - or the part of the self-concept, which is derived from meaningful participation in a group, together with the emotional significance attached to that membership [21] – can illuminate the groups in which working students participate meaningfully and serves as the mechanism that transforms their experiences into valuable parts of their self-concept. At the core of the Social Identity Approach [22,23] is the striving for positive distinctiveness through group participation, i.e., identifying as part of a group (and adopting its attitudes, behaviours, and norms; [24] can grant the individual a positive image of who they are. Thus, working students can identify with a number of different groups (being a student in general, being an employee, being a student of their own discipline, or being a working student) in different contexts and situations where their experiences enable them to see themselves in a positive light.

To exemplify this, previous research has suggested that identifying as a working student (as opposed to identifying as simply a student) can serve to increase academic motivation [25] or to elicit social support from other working students [26] as participants drew on their working experiences as a source of resilience that made them distinct from non-working students. Expanding on this example, working students can draw on their working experiences and identify as a member of any of the four groups discussed above which makes it important to discuss the positive implications of identifying with all of these groups. To assist this goal, we present three cross-sectional studies that explore whether the different foci of identification are associated with important positive academic and social outcomes in the present research. Because learning processes are intertwined with the social and personal dimensions of student life [27], the different foci of identification can be associated with important academic and social outcomes (academic self-efficacy, student approaches to learning, academic achievement, status in society), all of which have been previously linked with either commencing term-time employment or social identification processes.

We next present research that discusses why identifying with the four different foci can lead to positive distinctiveness for working students and then outline the proposed academic and social outcomes they can be linked with in more detail. We then present our three cross-sectional studies and discuss their results. Finally, we contend that future research can embed working students into specific interventions that are designed to transform their experiences through social identification and explore boundary conditions that can further impact their academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes.

1.1. Motivations for Identifying as a Student, Employee, Discipline of Study, and Working Student

Working students in higher education balance their roles as students and employees [28]. Their transitory immersion into either position inherently makes their identification processes more complex – whereas non-working students or workers may only identify with those respective social categories, working students can choose to identify as a *student*, as an *employee*, or indeed, as a *working student* in different contexts and situations. All of these groups can become sources of strength and resilience as identifying with either identity can be beneficial for working students to achieve positive distinctiveness in particular circumstances.

Firstly, to blend in with non-working students, working students can opt to identify as a student to minimise any differences between these groups [29]. Identifying as a student has also been associated with increases in well-being for all students [30]. Because previous research has suggested that the student identity may be a chronically salient identity for all students [31], in the current research we explore whether this identity is associated with important academic (academic self-efficacy and academic achievement) and social (status in society) outcomes for working students.

Secondly, working students may see commencing employment as a welcome sign of entering adulthood [25,32] which can make starting to work for pay a precursor to positive identity change [33]. Because of this reason, working students may also choose to adopt an employee identity - a form of social identification in which the individual feels a sense of belonging with the workplace, their colleagues, or the larger organisation [34] - as part of their self-concept. Working students may also choose to identify with other workers specifically so they can receive on-the-job guidance or mentorship [35] or to complain about management [36]. These motivations can make identifying as an employee important for working students and we wanted to explore whether employee identification is linked to their important academic (academic self-efficacy, approaches to learning, and academic achievement) and social (status in society) outcomes.

Thirdly, when considering learning processes, an important (and very salient) social identity for students is identification with their specific discipline of study [37]. Extensive literature has linked discipline identification to increases in using adaptive, deep approaches to learning which can positively influence academic performance [37–42], which makes discipline identification an important social identity for students in higher education. However, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no study to date which has explored the link between term-time employment, discipline identification, and important academic outcomes. We contend that this identity can be an important source of strength and resilience for working students because students in higher education can study their preferred discipline which represents their future profession [40]. Because of this, we wanted to explore whether this identity is associated with using deeper approaches to learning and academic achievement for working students specifically.

Finally, our previous research has found that considering important aspects of being a working student (thinking of oneself as having motivation, discipline, and skills, as well as being hardworking and organised) can foster this identification [18]. Additionally, when working students have frictional relations with colleagues or experience negative comparisons to non-working students, they can adopt the working student identity to maintain their positive self-view [26]. This research suggests that identifying as a working student can be an important mechanism in transforming the experiences of working students to foster resilience which is why we wanted to explore whether this identity is associated with academic achievement and status in society in the current research.

These different motivations suggest that working students could hold the identity of an employee, could hold the identity of a student, could hold the identity of being a student in their own discipline of study, and could also hold the identity of a working student. To explore whether these identities are associated with important academic and social outcomes, we next outline these outcomes in more detail and simultaneously present previous evidence that links them to commencing employment or the identities of students in general.

1.2. Academic and Social Outcomes

Self-efficacy in general has been described by Bandura [43] as ‘the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments’. Therefore, academic self-efficacy refers to the self-serving belief in one's potential to attain a certain level of academic achievement and is a belief that ‘operates within sociocultural influences’ [44]. Academic self-efficacy has also been associated with positive increases in academic achievement [45,46].

Huie et al. [47] have reported a small negative correlation between the weekly hours spent in paid employment and academic self-efficacy ($r = -.12$), and Pennington et al. [48] have revealed a positive association between student identification and academic self-efficacy for students in general. Because no studies have examined the link between academic self-efficacy and identification processes for working students specifically, we explored whether student identification and employee identification exhibit significant associations with academic self-efficacy in Study 1.

Because academic self-efficacy beliefs may represent stable beliefs in one's ability to deal with academic tasks [49], we wanted to explore whether identification processes may also influence how working students approach the way they learn more dynamically. Therefore, we explored whether discipline identification or employee identification are associated with choosing approaches to

learning [50] and academic achievement in Study 2. The two approaches to learning (deep and surface) consider how the learner uses the information they are given in response to a given academic task [51]. The deep approach to learning signals an intrinsic desire in the learner to consume information to improve their own understanding of the material [52]. Students who use deep approaches to learning carefully consider the given information, question its validity, and discuss it with interested others to make tenuous links with preexisting knowledge [53]. Students who use surface approaches to learning often pursue more extrinsic rewards (e.g., a better grade or a better job position), and use rote memorisation, exhibit lack of interest in alternative explanations, and defend the validity of their preferred solution [54]. Students may use either approach to learning in different situations [50,55].

Discipline identification has been linked to increases in using deep approaches to learning and using deep approaches to learning has been subsequently associated with increased objective academic achievement [37–42]. Therefore, fostering discipline identification in working students can lead them to use deep approaches to learning which might be especially important for those who are struggling with their academic performance [8,12] or use surface approaches to learning [16]. However, no studies to date have examined the relationship between term-time employment, discipline identification, and using either approach to learning. Additionally, working students who identify strongly as an employee may see studying as beneficial only to upskill or to find a different job, which can prompt them to use surface approaches to learning. Because of these reasons, we wanted to explore whether there are significant relationships between working students' discipline and employee identification and their use of different approaches to learning in Study 2.

There has been mixed evidence for the effect of commencing employment on students' academic achievement as some research has indicated a negative effect e.g., [8,12,56,57], while other evidence has suggested that working part-time can be beneficial [58–60]. Thus, illuminating important socio-psychological factors that can help working students to maintain or increase their academic achievement is important, and Wilkins et al. [61] have revealed that student identification is positively associated with the academic achievement of students in general. This led us to explore whether the different foci of identification are associated with the academic achievement of working students in Studies 2 and 3.

In terms of social outcomes, working students in Blake and Worsdale [62] indicated that a main reason for them commencing employment was to increase their status in society through accumulating more financial and cultural capital. Creed et al. [63] added credence to this argument as they suggested that job precariousness is associated with working students having lower social status. Because we theorise that working students have particular experiences which can act as symbols of resilience for their working student identity [18], we tested whether adopting the working student identity (and the student or employee identities) would be associated with their social status in Study 3.

1.3. The Present Study

We present three cross-sectional studies that link the different foci of identification with important academic and social outcomes for working students. More specifically, in Study 1 we explore whether student identification and employee identification are associated with working students' levels of academic self-efficacy. However, because self-efficacy beliefs might be more stable [49], we wanted to explore whether identification processes are associated with working students choosing a particular approach to studying which represents a more dynamic choice. Therefore, in Study 2, we examine whether discipline identification and employee identification are associated with using deep or surface approaches to learning [54] and subjective academic achievement. However, if the main reason behind working students attending university (and undertaking employment while doing so) is to improve their career choices and increase their status in society [64], then it is important to explore whether their different identities are associated with their perception of their general status in society. Therefore, in Study 3 we explore whether identifying as

a student, employee, and working student are associated with subjective academic achievement and status in society.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

We received ethical approval for all studies by the second author’s institution which is where we collected all data. We used an online questionnaire to collect data in all three studies. We recruited participants for each study by creating an online link which we included on an online study participation system (SONA) and on social media. We also distributed the link in the form of a QR code in classrooms and the library on campus. We further boosted recruitment by asking lecturers to give the online link to their students in seminars and lectures. All participants could enter prize draws for four prizes of £25 (Studies 1 and 2) or four prizes of £50 (Study 3). Ninety-seven working students took part in Study 1, of which 40 were male and 57 were female. Seventy working students took part in Study 2, of which 15 were male and 55 were female. Two-hundred and twenty-one working students took part in Study 3, of which 30 were male, 184 were female, and seven identified as another gender. Other demographic details for the three samples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for all variables in Studies 1-3.

	Study 1									
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	23.62	4.58	-							
2. Gender ^b	1.59	.50	-.13	-						
3. Working Hours ^d	11.26	5.13	.01	-.01	-					
4. Student Identification	5.59	1.09	-.09	-.04	.01	-				
5. Employee Identification	5.16	1.12	.06	.08	.01	.01	-			
6. Academic Self-Efficacy	2.76	.65	.11	-.14	.18 ⁺	.10	.03	-		
	Study 2									
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	23.34	3.19	-							
2. Gender ^b	1.79	.41	.11	-						
3. Working Hours ^d	16.55	10.55	.25 [*]	.15	-					
4. Discipline Identification	5.75	1.01	.16	.36 ^{**}	.20	-				
5. Employee Identification	4.94	1.45	.19	.08	.36 ^{**}	.26 [*]	-			
6. Deep Approaches to Learning	30.63	8.67	.25 [*]	.20 ⁺	.38 ^{***}	.47 ^{***}	.23 [*]	-		
7. Surface Approaches to Learning	25.40	5.37	.19	-.02	.27 [*]	.15	.22 ⁺	.36 ^{***}	-	
8. Academic Achievement	59.80	8.81	.19	.31 ^{**}	.07	.39 ^{***}	.06	.40 ^{***}	-.01	-
	Study 3									
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	22.20	5.97	-							
2. Gender ^{b,c}	1.90	.40	-.17 [*]	-						

3. Working Hours ^d	15.44	10.10	.30***	-.06	-					
4. Student Identification	5.08	1.44	-	.01	-					
			.26***		.26***	-				
5. Employee Identification	5.03	1.42	-.04	.05	-.05	.25***	-			
6. Working Student Identification	5.71	1.14	.07	.05	.23**	.24***	.21**	-		
7. Status in Society	5.07	1.79	.23**	.01	.12	.04	.05	-.17*	-	
8. Academic Achievement	66.26	8.51	.05	.01	.01	-.07	-.09	-.01	.24**	-

Note. $N_1 = 95$, $N_2 = 70$, $N_3 = 215$. ^b Identifying as male was coded as 1, and identifying as female was coded as 2. ^c Identifying as another gender was coded as 3, but those working students were removed from all analyses to preserve statistical power. ^d Measured as the hours in paid employment per week and averaged if the student has a flexible work pattern. * $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

2.2. Materials

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for all variables in the three studies are presented in Table 1. Strength of identification measures were measured using Likert-type scales ranging from [1] *Strongly Disagree* to [7] *Strongly Agree*, with 7 indicating maximum strength of identification.

2.2.1. Strength of Identification Measures

Student social identification was measured in Study 1 using four modified items from the scale originated by Doosje et al. [65] (e.g., ‘*I feel strong ties with other University XXX¹ students*’). The scale had a good internal consistency in this sample as measured by Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .82$). An average score of student social identity was then computed for each participant.

Employee identification was measured in Studies 1 and 2 using the same scale with modifications to disentangle this identity from the student identity (e.g., ‘*I identify with other employees of the organisation I am currently employed in*’). The scale had a good internal consistency in both studies as measured by Cronbach’s alpha (Study 1: $\alpha = .78$; Study 2: $\alpha = .80$). An average score of employee identity was computed for each participant in both studies.

Discipline identification was measured in Study 2 with a 5-item measure of discipline identification adopted from Smyth et al. [39]. One example question ‘*I would rather NOT tell other people that I am a student in my field of study*’ was reverse scored. The scale had an adequate internal reliability ($\alpha = .82$).

In Study 3 we opted to assess student, employee, and working student identification using a single item for each construct adapted from Postmes et al. [66]. An example item was ‘*I identify with working students*’. We chose this method of assessing strength of identification in this study because the items formed part of a larger project and we wanted to reduce any cognitive load experienced by working students who completed the survey.

2.2.2. Academic and Social Outcomes

Academic self-efficacy was measured in Study 1 using four items from Marsh et al.’s [67] scale (e.g., ‘*I’m certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in texts*’). The factor had a good internal consistency in this study as measured by Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .81$) and an average score was computed for each participant. Possible answers ranged from [1] *Almost Never* to [4] *Always*, with 4 indicating a maximum academic self-efficacy.

¹ Blinded for review.

Deep and surface approaches to learning were examined in Study 2 using the 20-item Revised Two-Factor Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F; 54). This is a shortened version of the SPQ and is particularly useful for quick administration. 10 items each measured both approaches to learning and illustrative items include, *'I find that at times studying gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction'*, and *'My aim is to pass the course while doing as little work as possible'*, for deep and surface approaches, respectively. The scores on both pairs of ten items were then added to create composite scores of a deep approach ($\alpha = .81$) and a surface approach ($\alpha = .79$) to learning. Possible answers ranged from [1] *Strongly Disagree* to [5] *Strongly Agree*, with 5 indicating a maximum deep or surface approach to learning.

We asked students about their subjective academic performance in Studies 2 and 3 using one item: *'What was your average module result in the autumn term?'*. Participants answered this question by dragging a slider which ranged from [0] to [100], with 100 indicating a perfect average module result in the autumn term. We preferred to measure the termly result in line with Pike et al. [68], who maintained that this result should be easily recalled by the respondents, and because students may have taken holidays to work on particular essays or examinations, which suggests that the effect of work may not influence a more particular assignment.

We asked working students about their general status in society in Study 3 using an adapted pictorial ladder measure from Adler et al. [69], which is often used to identify participants' subjective socioeconomic status e.g., [70]. In the ladder measure, the higher the rung of the ladder is selected, the higher one's status in society is, and participants could select from [1] *Zero status in society* to [10] *Utmost status in society*.

2.3. Analysis

To assess the exploratory associations between constructs in the different studies, we created path analyses using RStudio and the *lavaan* package (lavaan v. 0.6-7, [71]). We included age, gender, working hours as control variables in all models. Because we had small sample sizes for path analyses, we used bootstrapping with 10,000 bootstrap iterations [72] to estimate the parameters and their associated standard errors in the models. We place strength of identification measures as predictors of academic and social outcomes experienced by working students in higher education, however, our cross-sectional data does not rule out the possibility that any increases in the academic and social correlates could lead to increases in strength of identification, or that these effects are bidirectional.

3. Results

3.1. Study 1

In Study 1 we assessed whether the student identity and the employee identity are associated with working students' levels of academic self-efficacy. We found that working hours were marginally significantly associated with academic self-efficacy ($b = .18, p = .08$). However, the social identities were not significantly associated with academic self-efficacy. These results suggest that any increases in academic self-efficacy for working students may not be caused by them identifying as a student or as an employee but rather via different socio-psychological processes. The model explained 8% of the variance in academic self-efficacy scores.

3.2. Study 2

In Study 2 we wanted to understand whether discipline identification and employee identification were associated with approaches to learning and with academic achievement. We constructed a model with academic achievement as an outcome variable, which was predicted by deep and surface approaches to learning. These two approaches to learning were predicted by discipline identification and employee identification in this model.

Deep approaches to learning were significantly associated with academic achievement ($b = .35, p = .002$). Discipline identification was significantly associated with using a deep approach to learning

($b = .41, p = .001$). These effects suggest that thinking about oneself in terms of one's discipline can lead to using the deep approach to learning more, which can in turn aid working students' academic achievement.

Working hours were also significantly associated with using a deep approach to learning ($b = .32, p = .01$), suggesting that there could be additional socio-psychological processes that explain why working students use deep approaches to learning. The model explained 29.1% of the variance in academic achievement scores, 11.8% of the variance in surface approaches to learning scores, and 33.2% of the variance in deep approaches to learning scores.

3.3. Study 3

In Study 3, we aimed to explore whether identifying as a student, an employee, and as a working student was associated with increases in academic achievement and status in society. Our results suggest that none of the focal constructs were significantly associated with academic achievement, which is in line with the results of Study 2. This suggests that identification processes may exert positive influence on the ways in which working students approach their studies, but not directly on their results.

Student identification ($b = .16, p = .05$) was significantly associated with status in society scores. This suggests that identifying strictly with other students (rather than specifically with working students) could increase working students' own societal perceptions. The model explained 4.8% of the variance in academic achievement scores, and 12.5% of the variance in status in society scores.

4. Discussion

Our findings suggest that student identification is associated with increased status in society for working students, and that their discipline identification is associated with using deep approaches to learning. We also found that the weekly hours students spend in part-time work are positively linked to their levels of academic self-efficacy and using deep approaches to learning.

Our results support previous research on the positive relationship between discipline identification and using deep approaches to learning [37–42] and extend those to working students. This result reveals the importance of fostering discipline identification in higher education, and especially so for working students who might miss lectures [14] or do not attend campus altogether [15]. Researchers can increase the discipline identification of working students by reminding them of the reasons why they study (i.e., through values affirmation, [25]) and thus position part-time employment as a vehicle for working students to use deep approaches to learning and indirectly increase their academic achievement.

Although we expected that identifying as a working student by seeing that identity in positive terms would be associated with having improved status in society, we found that *student* identification (rather than *working student* identification) was significantly associated with increased status in society. However, because society might place a relatively higher status on being a student over being an employee [26], making working students see themselves as similar to other, non-working students can have important positive effects on other important social outcomes, such as belonging and receiving social support from all students. Following Fernandez et al. [73]'s typology of belonging in higher education, we hypothesise that working students who feel *lack of authenticity* can benefit from events which aim to minimise the differences between them and non-working students in order to receive social support (akin to Levine et al. [74]). Similarly, feeling *similar to others* is a different form of belonging, yet one which is often disrupted for working students because their experiences are different to the experiences of non-working students [26,32,75]. Therefore, finding ways to raise the student identification of working students might be an important first step for them to belong at university and to receive social support from all students.

We also found that the hours students spend per week working in paid employment were positively associated with their academic self-efficacy (in Study 1) and with using a deep approach to learning (in Study 2). These findings suggest that there could be additional socio-psychological processes that explain why working longer hours is associated with these positive academic

outcomes. However, because of our cross-sectional data, we cannot rule out the possibility that students who feel that they have a good academic standing already are more likely to allow themselves to work longer hours. As both of these suggestions are plausible, future research using longitudinal methods can disentangle the relationship between working hours and positive academic outcomes further. Such research can also better control for changes in students' jobs, such as reducing hours of work, changing the nature of job, or quitting employment altogether (c.f., [47]).

Although working student identification and employee identification were not linked to the outcomes we measured, future research can seek to transform the experiences of working students to boost identification with these identities as they can be linked to different academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes. For example, identifying as a working student might be important to positively differentiate the student from non-working students, which can help to equip oneself with the appropriate defences against negative intergroup comparisons and to receive social support from other working students [26]. Identifying as a working student can be achieved by leaning on positive aspects of being one, such as having motivation and discipline or being hardworking and organised [18]. However, if the working student identity is built on the narrative of working students having adverse consequences, then it is unlikely that working students would espouse this identity and that this identity would be linked to beneficial academic, social, and graduate outcomes.

Conversely, higher employee identification could lead to an increase in perceived meaningfulness of their course [25] or to a reduction in degree consumerism (defined as expecting high grades in courses due to paying university fees; [76]) in working students. Indeed, working students in previous studies have maintained that work is more fun than university [77] and that work provides them with more satisfaction from university itself [78]. High employee identification may also be associated with receiving on-the-job mentorship and support [35] and can thus lead to increases in important graduate employability outcomes.

Examining graduate employability outcomes in general can be an important extension to our current research, as it has been suggested that working students embark on more financially successful career trajectories after graduation in comparison to non-working students [79]. Working part-time can help to build skills and competencies employers and educators seek in students [80], such as time-management skills [81], increased social network [14], and confidence [82]. Working students are also more likely to be prepared to work harder [28], and to have better interpersonal skills than non-working students [83]. Because of these reasons, future research that seeks to transform the experiences of working students into forms of resilience can also explore the relationships between the identification processes of working students and their graduate employability outcomes.

4.1. Considerations for Future Research

The studies in the current research present initial evidence for how social identification processes can influence academic and social outcomes for working students. To augment this research, we now use our findings as an important point of departure and discuss recommendations to 1. Increase working students' levels of identification with the different foci; 2. Explore boundary conditions that can influence the relationships between identification processes and academic, social, and graduate outcomes. Following these recommendations can help practitioners to support working students in navigating higher education effectively by linking their experiences to their identification processes and to additional important academic, social, and graduate outcomes.

4.1.1. Ways to Increase Identification for Working Students

The experiences of working students could be useful in transforming the narrative surrounding working students from one of adverse consequences to a narrative of perseverance and resilience [18]. Transforming the narrative could create a positive image of what it means to be a working student, and future research can both facilitate this transformation and examine the positive academic, social, and graduate outcomes emanating from it. We next present three specific ways of achieving these aims.

Positive psychology principles [19,82,84] can help to foster identification with the different social identities that working students hold. Nicklin et al. [19] have found that practicing mindfulness, and expressing self-compassion, resilience, and recovery are associated with lower levels of stress in working graduate students. Ng and Kong [84] have also found that mindfulness is associated with working students having increased levels of positive affect and resilience. Kocherhina & Stelmashchuk [82] show that working students exhibit higher levels of self-regulation and self-acceptance in comparison to non-working students. We posit that creating interventions that enable working students to identify with the different groups on the basis of these positive psychology principles can lead to increases in important academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes.

Fostering mindfulness for working students can be achieved through acceptance and commitment training [85]. This type of training aims to make the individual see themselves as detached from daily stressors (e.g., stressful work experiences or negative comparisons to non-working students) and to act in line with their own values and motivations [86]. Working students who have undergone acceptance and commitment training report increases in life satisfaction, mindfulness, and wellbeing [87] and reductions in stress and symptoms of depression [88]. University students in general also report improved time and effort management [89] and academic performance [90] after undergoing acceptance and commitment training. This accumulated evidence suggests that developing acceptance and commitment interventions can help to improve the academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes of working students and this can be achieved by increasing their identification with relevant groups.

Identity-reframing interventions [91–93] also aim to foster resilience by focusing on the positive experiences of being a member of a particular group. Identity-reframing interventions have led to increased study engagement and course completion for refugees [92], reducing academic anxiety in first-generation students [93], and reducing depression in the general population [91]. Thus, embedding working students into an identity-reframing intervention based on the positive aspects of being a working student [18] can assess whether the intervention leads to increased identification and improved academic, social, and graduate outcomes.

4.1.2. Exploring Boundary Conditions of Identification

The effects of identification processes on academic and social outcomes for working students may also be dependent on other socio-psychological processes. Because some of the identities can have contrasting norms and behaviours, working students may experience a sense of *identity incompatibility* [94]. As an example, commencing employment can be associated with entering adulthood and taking on additional responsibilities, whereas being a student may be associated with having free time and fun [25]. Because experiencing identity incompatibility can be associated with decreasing identification with one of the incompatible identities [95] and lower academic achievement [96], future research can examine whether the different identities we examined are perceived as incompatible and whether this affects the academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes of working students.

The relationships between identification processes and important outcomes may also be dependent on *intergroup differentiation*, or the perceived degree of difference between working and non-working students. Indeed, working students who perceive differences between these groups can feel a sense of isolation and lack of adaptation at university [32,97,98]. Thus, contexts that minimise the differences between working and non-working students can foster a higher sense of identification and can lead to increases in important outcomes (e.g., belonging, social support) for working students.

Finally, *superordinate group prototypicality* (the extent to which individuals believe that their group, and not a relevant outgroup, is best representative of an overarching category that combines both groups, [99]) may also impact the link between identification processes and important outcomes. As an example, if working students believe that they represent what it means to be a student better than non-working students, then identification as a working student (where differences between groups are exaggerated) may become more important for fostering positive outcomes. Conversely, if

non-working students are perceived to represent better what it means to be a student, then identifying as a student (where the differences between groups should be minimised) may become more important to foster positive outcomes. These considerations point to the importance of understanding the relationships between the different identities and the context in which they are situated to foster positive academic, social, and graduate employability outcomes for working students.

4.2. Limitations of the Current Research

Although our studies link identification processes to academic and social outcomes for working students, the findings are subject to the cross-sectional nature of our data. We now present two additional considerations which future research can implement to disentangle the causal associations between the social identities of working students and their academic, social, and graduate outcomes.

Firstly, we measured strength of identification with the different groups at a particular point in time. Because of this, we were not able to track how working students develop their identification over time and whether such changes in the strength of identification were associated with academic and social outcomes. Future research can explore how working students' identities change during the course of their university students by using longitudinal (e.g., through narrative analysis; [20]) or experimental (e.g., acceptance and commitment training; [85]) approaches. This will extend the current research by exploring when the different identities become important for working students and whether they are linked to important academic and social outcomes at those points in time.

Secondly, understanding how and why working students identify with the different groups throughout their time at university is also important because working students can be at a particular risk of dropping out of university [17]. Effective strategies to mitigate that risk can include adapting university policies to help working students (such as collapsing teaching sessions into two weekdays) and creating events designed to foster identification and belonging for working students [4]. However, these types of support may have limited impact if the support is not aligned with students' identities – for example, working students may identify strongly with the student identity at the beginning stages of their course but place more importance on their employee identity towards the end of their degree. Extending the current research to understand when (and due to what motivation) working students identify with the different groups can serve to inform institutional support offerings and to present working students as persevering and resilient students in higher education.

5. Conclusions

We present three cross-sectional studies in which we explored whether the social identities of working students (identifying as a student, an employee, as student in own discipline of study, and as a working student) were associated with important academic (academic self-efficacy, approaches to learning, and academic achievement) and social (status in society) outcomes. While student identification was positively associated with working students' status in society, discipline identification was positively associated with using deep approaches to learning. We suggest two distinct ways to augment our research and to assess whether the social identities of working students can act as important mechanisms to increase the resilience and perseverance of working students in higher education. Conducting important interventions (based on either positive psychology principles, acceptance and commitment coaching, or previous identity-reframing interventions) can help to transform working students' experiences into sources of resilience and motivation. Exploring boundary conditions (such as levels of intergroup differentiation, superordinate group prototypicality, and identity incompatibility) can also enhance our understanding of the effect of identification processes on important academic, social, and graduate outcomes. We hope that the present research sparks additional interest from researchers and practitioners who aim to enhance students' academic outcomes, foster their social adaptation at university, and strengthen their graduate employability.

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